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AUTHOR Vail, Ann; Redick, Sharon S.
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ABSTRACT

Characteristics and experiences of established leaders who were alumni of vocational student organizations (VSOs) were identified in a survey. Data were drawn from a data bank established by Kathryn Cox (1988) in her dissertation, "Significant Adolescent Leadership Development Experiences Identified by Established Leaders in the United States." Cox's subjects were a stratified random sample of 1,000 established leaders; 125 leaders were selected at random from the appropriate directories for each of 8 categories of leadership. Data were gathered by a written questionnaire; 411 leaders returned completed, usable questionnaires. From those 411 responses, 31 identified a VSO as at least 1 of the youth programs in which they participated. These 31 respondents were the sample in this study; the remaining respondents were used as the comparison group. Frequencies, percentages, and means were used to describe the data. Chi-square was used to measure significant differences. VSO alumni reported involvement in other activities, were more likely to pursue leadership opportunities in the skills category, and had a broad range of leadership definitions. Respondents cited collaborative experiences as the most important. Findings suggested that components of future VSOs' leadership development programs ought to include mentors and role models, collaborative activities, and communication-building activities. (Contains 17 references and 3 tables.) (YLB)

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Characteristics and Experiences of Leaders Who Are Alumni of Vocational Student Organizations

Ann Vail
Assistant Professor
School of Family and Consumer Sciences
University of Idaho
Moscow, Idaho 83844-3183

and

Sharon S. Redick
Professor

The Ohio State University
Department of Home Economics Education
1787 Neil Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43210-1295

RUNNING HEAD: ALUMNI OF VSO'S

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Abstract

Established leaders with vocational student organization experience were examined in this study. These leaders tended to be participants in other youth organizations; from rural areas; from families with both parents present; and representative of a cross-section of areas in which leadership was exercised. They recommended collaborative experiences and interactions with mentors and role models as the most important leadership development experiences for today's youth.

Characteristics and Experiences of Leaders Who Are Alumni of vocational student organizations

Vocational student organizations provide leadership development opportunities for students enrolled in vocational education programs. Viewed as an integral part of the vocational education program, vocational student organizations focus on the concept of total student development as a means for students to assume roles in society as a whole and the labor market in particular. Ten national vocational student organizations recognized by the U.S. Department of Education are the following: Business Professionals of America, Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA), Future Business Leaders of America - Phi Beta Lambda/(FBLA-PBL), National FFA Organization (FFA), Future Homemakers of America (FHA/HERO), Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), National Post-secondary Agriculture Student Organization (PAS), National Young Farmer Association (NYFA), Technology Student Association (TSA), and Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA)(National Coordinating Council for vocational student organizations, 1990).

Numerous studies have been conducted regarding youth organizations in general and vocational student organizations in specific. Few of these studies focus on alumni or the differences between former members and non-members of the organizations.

In a study of former members, the Ohio Council on Vocational Education (1985) found that on a scale of 1-10 former members gave vocational student organizations a rating of 9.05 for the value of personal skill development gained through the organizations. Through personal interviews they identified numerous personal skills that resulted from active participation in vocational student organizations. The top three skills were exemplary work habits, ability to carry out interpersonal skills in working with others (honesty, integrity, cooperation) and possession of effective communication skills.

In a study for which the purpose was to determine the impact of vocational agriculture/FFA on community leadership, Brannon, Holley and Key (1989) reported that 17% of their sample of community leaders indicated that vocational agriculture/FFA had a great impact and 16% indicated that it had much impact on their

community leadership success. Vocational agriculture/FFA alumni had a statistically significant, higher degree of involvement in community activities than non-members. This included involvement in community affairs organizations, school organizations, church groups, and educational groups. The community leaders with vocational agriculture/FFA experience indicated their leadership activities were effective in developing their leadership skills, contributed to their success, and have been of value in their careers regardless of their occupations. Fourteen percent of their respondents were in educational occupations.

Other studies regarding alumni of former members have been conducted among former 4-H members. Texas A & M University conducted a national study comparing former 4-H members, former members of other youth organizations (including vocational student organizations) and nonparticipants in youth organizations. Those who had joined 4-H and other youth groups were similar in personal characteristics, but different from the nonparticipants. 4-H alumni most valued the inputs and teachings of adult volunteer

leaders, family members, and club meetings (Ladewig and Thomas, 1987a and 1987b).

Rockwell, et al (1981) identified two aspects of 4-H that former members saw as having been very important--increasing knowledge in project areas and competing with others. 4-H programs, activities, leaders, and agents were believed to have influenced members' choices of potential careers, institutions of higher education, areas of study for advanced education and first and subsequent occupations.

Perceptions of 4-H alumni from four Ohio counties concerning the impact of 4-H indicated it had much impact on their self-awareness, particularly concerning interests and skills. They perceived 4-H as also having some impact on their career awareness, exploration and selection (Matulis and Hedges, 1985).

In Cox's (1988) study of national leaders, these leaders identified types of experiences important for the development of leadership skills among adolescents. They include the following: collaborative experiences, personal characteristics development, availability of mentors and role models, cultural and citizenship experiences, and communication experiences.

Backgrounds and experiences of these leaders which they identified as having contributed to their leadership development were very similar to the experiences they recommended for adolescent leadership development.

While research has focused on youth organizations and on vocational student organizations, little of this emphasis has included alumni or former members of these organizations. Research needs to address the perspective of this neglected group.

Purpose

The purpose in this study was to identify characteristics and experiences of established leaders who are alumni of vocational student organizations and to examine those characteristics and experiences in relation to those who were not members of vocational student organizations. To fulfill the purpose of the study, the objectives of the study were to

1. Identify characteristics of established leaders who have vocational student organization involvement in terms of:
   a) personal characteristics,

b) leadership characteristics and experiences,

c) recommended leadership experiences for today's youth.

2. Determine if differences exist between the established leaders who were members of vocational student organizations and those who were not in terms of the preceding variables.

The research design is descriptive and static group comparison/ex post facto relational.

The Data Base

The data for this study were drawn from a data bank established by Kathryn Cox (1988) in her study--Significant Adolescent Leadership Development Experiences Identified by Established Leaders in the United States. The goal in that study was to provide information on which future decisions related to leadership development activities for youth may be based. The variables in Cox's descriptive study include the following: personal leadership style, personal leadership definition, self-perceptions of

leadership, personal leadership strengths and weaknesses, personal leadership development experiences, gender, marital status, age, education, religion, and family experiences.

Sample

Cox's (1988) target population consisted of established leaders in eight leadership sectors identified by Lasswell (Cunningham, 1983) (See Table 1). Laswell proposes that educational leaders ought to associate themselves with eight different sectors of the community in which leadership is exercised. Therefore, in order to provide a comprehensive and holistic perspective for the study, Cox identified leaders in each of the eight sectors to comprise the target population. The frame for the population was established using 70 directories of public and private sector leaders in the United States. While the majority of the directories were lists of all individuals in particular positions, some were compiled through nomination processes and included self-nominations. The directories were assigned to the

appropriate sector in the Lasswell educational leadership model.

Cox's (1988) sample consisted of a stratified random sample of 1,000 established leaders. One hundred twenty-five leaders were selected at random from the appropriate directories for each of the eight categories of leadership outlined by Lasswell (Cunningham, 1983). The sample included participants from every state and the District of Columbia, as well as participants from the territories of Puerto Rico and American Samoa.

Four hundred eleven of the 1,000 leaders surveyed returned completed, usable questionnaires. The respondents were generally representative of the sample with regard to distribution among leadership categories, gender, and state of residence. In addition, no significant differences were found between the early and late respondents in relation to 20 of the 22 variables investigated. Therefore, because (a) the stratified sample was drawn randomly and reflected a balance of leadership categories, state of residence, and gender within the population identified, (b) because the distribution of respondents reflected a

similar balance, and (c) because literature (Smith, 1984) has shown the non-response error is minimal when early and late responses are similar and such similarity was apparent between the early and late respondents in this study, the findings can be viewed with confidence as to their generalizability to the population of established leaders in the United States.

Instrumentation

The data were gathered by a written questionnaire developed by Cox (1988) for her descriptive study which included 23 items and was ten pages in length. A follow-up series of phone interviews was conducted to confirm findings. In regards to validity the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts and pilot-tested twice before it was administered to the national sample. The second pilot test was conducted exactly as the national study with the exception being that Ohio leaders were selected from each of Lasswell's leadership sectors. Reliability was not established for this descriptive instrument.

Sample

From those 411 responses, 31 identified a vocational student organization as at least one of the youth programs in which they participated. These 31 respondents were used as the sample in this study. It should be noted that this is a small number and is not large enough to be representative of all vocational student organization alumni. The remaining respondents were used as the comparison group. The sample group consisted of 13 females and 18 males.

Leaders in the sample were members of five vocational student organizations: Future Farmers of America, Future Homemakers of America, Distributive Education Clubs of America, Future Business Leaders of America and Vocational Industrial Clubs of America. All vocational student organizations were not represented in the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted to describe the data and to determine significant differences between the two groups of leaders. Frequencies, percentages, and means were used to describe the data. Chi-square was used to measure significant differences.

Findings and Discussion

Personal Characteristics

In addressing the first research objective, personal characteristics included gender, marital status, religious affiliation, family structure, and residence. Participants in the study were somewhat equally distributed between males and females. Thirteen (41.94%) of the respondents were female and 18 (58.06%) of the respondents were male. The comparison group was not as equally distributed with 33.16% females and 66.84% males. It is interesting to note that when Cox drew the original sample it was a stratified random sample of 30% females and 70% males. Females responded at a slightly higher rate especially if they were leaders with vocational student organization experience.

Stiles (1986) specifically identified adolescent girls as a target group for leadership training during secondary school years because they tend to become less confident, less ambitious, and less assertive during this time. Wynne (1984) advocates single sex training for adolescent leadership development. Given the time which these respondents were members of vocational

student organizations, more than likely they were participants in organizations comprised of one sex. Perhaps that partially accounts for higher participation rates of female vocational student organization alumni. Now that vocational student organizations are integrated, for very good reasons, perhaps additional attention ought to be given to the two gender groups to ensure the emergence of leadership skills in both groups.

The majority of national leaders surveyed were married while a higher percentage of those without vocational student organization experience were never married, were widowed or divorced. Leaders with vocational student organization experience tended to be older. The majority of all leaders in the survey had some type of education beyond high school with most of them having at least a bachelor's degree.

Most of the leaders with vocational student organization experience were Protestant. In response to the second research objective, differences do exist between the two groups. The chi square test indicated a statistically significant difference at the .029 level in regards to religious preference.

Most leaders lived at home with both of their parents. The importance of family cannot be under estimated in leadership development. In Klonsky's (1983) study families were identified as facilitators of certain attitudes, motives, and competencies that allow one to consider leader position entry and perform adequately in one's leadership role. Vocational educators ought to pay specific attention to those students whose family has been unable to facilitate these attitudes, motives, and competencies, for whatever reasons. Perhaps through participation in vocational student organizations this can occur.

In all age groups, the majority of the leaders with vocational student organization experience tended to live in a rural area or a small town. In the comparison group a broader distribution of residences existed. In response to the second research objective, differences do exist between the two groups. The chi square test indicated a statistical significance at the <.0004 level. This is not surprising, given the fact that most of these leaders were teenagers during the time vocational student organizations were beginning.

During those early days the organizations tended to be more active and stronger outside the urban areas.

Leadership Characteristics and Experiences

The first research objective also included leadership characteristics and experiences. Vocational student organization alumni were involved in other organizations as well. They reported involvement in other school organizations, church, athletics, chorus, 4-H, Scouts, band, Junior Achievement, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Grange. They did not isolate themselves from other activities. They chose vocational student organization participation in addition to other involvement, not in place of it.

Even though the Cox sample was evenly distributed, alumni of vocational student organizations were not evenly distributed throughout Lasswell's (Cunningham, 1983) leadership categories. Table 1 shows the majority of respondents (n=13 or 41%)

Insert Table 1 about here

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exercise leadership in the skills category. The skills category includes people involved in human resource

development and teachers in educational systems not leading to a baccalaureate degree including elementary, secondary, and vocational schools. To address the second research objective, the chi square test was performed to test the leadership categories of leaders with and without vocational student organization experience, significance was indicated at the .009 level. Leaders with vocational student organization experience are more likely to pursue leadership and/or career opportunities in the skills category and least likely to pursue leadership opportunities in the rectitude and well-being categories. These findings are similar to the findings of Brannon, Holley and Key in that their respondents also tended to exercise leadership in educational groups.

When asked to determine their families' influence in the sectors developed by Lasswell (Cunningham, 1983), most participants indicated a low level of influence in all sectors. In response to the second research objective, differences do exist between the two groups. The chi square test indicates there was a statistical difference between the two groups in the power (.014), skills (.009) and well-being (.041)

sectors. Leaders with vocational student organization experience perceived that their families' influence was less in the power sector and more in the skills and well-being sectors than leaders without vocational organization experience. The respondents felt their families had little influence in government, judicial systems, and other political organizations. They perceived their families had a higher level of influence in education and other human service organizations which included health and safety groups.

Leaders with vocational student organization experience have a broad range of leadership definitions. As many researchers have pointed out, there is no common definition of leadership. It is a complex concept which has been addressed from a variety of perspectives (Stogdill, 1974, Johnson and Johnson, 1975; Sisk, 1985; Cox, 1988). Professionals responsible for leadership development programs would be wise to keep in mind this diversity when designing such programs. Their students are also likely to define leadership differently; therefore, they need a variety of experiences and opportunities to enable them to develop their full leadership potential. Gardner

(1987) suggests people should be given a sense of the many kinds of leaders, definitions of leadership and styles of leadership with encouragement to move toward the one that is right for them.

Table 2 lists experiences identified by leaders as

Insert Table 2 about here

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helping them personally in becoming leaders. Leaders with vocational student organization experience listed the following experiences: experiences with mentors and/or nurturers, group leadership experiences, significant life and/or background experiences, collaborative experiences, employment and internship experiences, formal education, and personal development experiences. The comparison group had similar rankings with the exception that group leadership experiences and significant life and/or background experiences were reversed in position. In addition, 31.25% of leaders with vocational student organization experience, in contrast to 24.39% of leaders without vocational student organization experience, identified experiences

with mentors and/or nurturers as their most important leadership development experience.

Leaders with and without vocational student organization experience identified that a higher percentage of their mentors came from the skills category, which includes teachers at all levels of the pre-baccalaureate educational system. Even though the skills category was highest for both groups, it was 150% greater for leaders with vocational student organization experience than for leaders without vocational student organization experience.

Recommended Leadership Experiences for Today's Youth

A research objective addressed recommended leadership experiences for today's youth. In Cox's (1988) study, 60 experiences were given in response to the question, "What experiences do you believe are most important for the development of leadership by today's teenagers?" Since many of these experiences were closely related, they were organized into 20 leadership experience categories. Table 3

Insert Table 3 about here

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indicates how leaders with vocational student organizations experience responded. It is important to note that 23.36% of the respondents indicated collaborative experiences as the most important. In this study collaborative experiences were considered to be activities which involved working with others either in formal organizations or on a variety of different projects.

Giammatteo and Giammatteo (1981) also recognized the importance of collaborative, group experiences. They propose that through conscientious effort, study, and practice one can learn this skill. Leadership development experiences will need to be designed with this in mind in order to help students acquire competencies in collaboration with others.

Implications and Recommendations

Findings from this study provide direction for program development in vocational student organizations. Components of future vocational student organizations' leadership development programs ought to include mentors and role models, collaborative activities, and communication-building activities.

Access to role models and mentors appears to be an important feature of vocational student organizations; therefore, more opportunities for the development of these types of relationships need to exist. Current opportunities limited to advisors and employers need to be expanded.

In order to better prepare students for their role as leaders, vocational student organization programs need to contain a collaborative component. Emphasis is often times placed on competition. Focus needs to be shifted to a balanced approach between collaboration and competition, perhaps integrating the two.

Experiences which develop the communication skills necessary for leadership development ought to be incorporated into existing programs. Based on responses in this study, vocational student organizations will be most effective when they focus on collaboration, mentors and role models, and communication.

This study supports the Texas A & M study which also found that membership in a youth organization is important in developing leadership skills. There is no indication that one particular organization is better

able to develop these skills than any other organization.

Vocational student organizations are a potential source of new teachers evidenced by the number of vocational student organization alumni who have become teachers. Caution needs to be exercised to ensure that we inform vocational student organization members of other opportunities for exercising their leadership skills.

Support needs to be given to those students choosing involvement in both vocational student organizations and other activities. Leaders in this study who were vocational student organization alumni had been involved in other student activities.

Since females seem to especially benefit from vocational student organization experiences there should be increased efforts to recruit females into vocational student organizations.

Since leaders in the study tended to come from families with both parents present, special attention needs to be given to those students coming from single parent families. Relationships with other supportive adults should be encouraged.

In summary, suggestions related to program development and improvement are:

1. Inform students of a variety of leadership opportunities in all eight sectors of leadership. Continue to recruit leaders into the skills category of leadership once they have been informed of all options.
2. Investigate and develop programs promoting mentoring relationships with people besides vocational student organization advisors and employers.
3. Include collaborative activities and/or components in vocational student organization programs. Shift programming from a competitive aspect to a balance between collaboration and competition.
4. Develop a mentoring training program for teachers and employers in order to support them in this role.

Directions for future research include the following recommendations. Leaders described several youth organizations in which they were members. Research into the impact of membership in various youth organizations needs to be conducted. A focus on gender

differences in developing future leaders ought to be considered. Further research into the specific vocational student organizations is needed. Do vocational student organizations differ in their ability to develop leaders? The combination of membership in vocational student organizations and other student activities ought to be examined.

Vocational student organizations have been recognized as contributing to leadership development. Research and programming based on findings of this study can further efforts in providing students with meaningful leadership opportunities.

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Table 1
Sector in Which Leadership was Exercised

Title of Sector Organizations Included in Sector	With Vocational Student Organization Experience n = (%)	Without Vocational Student Organization Experience n (%)
Skills Human Resource development; Proprietary, Public, and	13 (41.9)	54 (14.2)*
Non-public schools	4 (12.9)	46 (12.1)
Affection Families, Family support groups	4 (12.9)	53 (13.9)
Enlightenment Higher education, Research organizations, media	3 (9.7)	33 (8.7)*
Power Government, Courts, Unions, Related organizations	2 (6.5)	57 (15.0)
Rectitude Religious organizations	2 (6.5)	44 (11.6)
Respect Civil-rights groups, Fraternities, Sororities, Honor societies	2 (6.5)	43 (11.3)
Wealth/Poverty Landowners, Business, Insurance foundations, Poverty programs	1 (3.2)	50 (13.2)*
Well-being Health organizations, Security safety, Supporting societies		

*Chi Square (2, n = 411) = 18.615 p = .009
Cramer's v = .213

Table 2

Important Personal Leadership Development Experiences

	With Vocational Student Organization Experience		Without Vocational Student Organization Experience	
Experience	f	(%)	f	(%)
Experiences with Mentors/Nurturers	25	(31.25)	219	(24.39)
Group Leadership Experiences	18	(22.50)	144	(16.04)
Significant Life/ Background Experiences	13	(16.25)	197	(21.94)
Collaborative Experiences	12	(15.00)	112	(12.47)
Employment and Internship Experiences	5	(6.25)	79	(8.80)
Formal Education	4	(5.00)	87	(9.69)
Personal Development	3	(3.75)	60	(6.68)

Table 3

Experiences Identified by Established Leaders as Most Important for Leadership Development by Teenagers

	With Vocational Student Organization Experience		Without Vocational Student Organization Experience	
Experience	f	(%)	f	(%)
Collaborative Experience	28	(23.26)	230	(23.30)
Mentors/Role Models/ Nurturers	11	(12.79)	102	(10.33)
Communication Experiences	11	(12.79)	84	(8.51)
Formal Education	8	(9.30)	65	(6.59)
Personal Characteristic Development	7	(8.14)	109	(11.04)
Group Leadership Experiences	7	(8.14)	76	(7.70)
Employment or Internship Experiences	6	(6.98)	79	(8.00)
Significant Life Experiences	6	(6.09)	58	(5.88)
Management Control Experiences	5	(5.81)	84	(8.51)
Cultural and Citizenship Experiences	5	(5.81)	100	(10.13)